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Madli Lääne
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The Report Committee for Madli Lääne
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:

THREE AUGUST DAYS

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor:

Andrew Shea

Co-Supervisor:

Nancy Schiesari

Co-Supervisor:

Anne Lewis

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Madli Lääne

Report

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Dedication

To Anni.

Acknowledgements

To my cast and crew for their dedication.

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Abstract

THREE AUGUST DAYS

Madli Lääne, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisors: Andrew Shea, Nancy Schiesari, Anne Lewis

This Master's Report is an honest insight and self-reflection about the development and production of the narrative short film "Three August Days". The film was produced as my graduate thesis film in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin in partial fulfillment of a Master of Fine Arts in Film & Media Production. This report touches more deeply on the topics I was tackling or engaged with most during this project, like working with child non-actors and creating a period piece.

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BEFORE THE THESIS

I came to study film production at the University of Texas at Austin to get training in filmmaking. I had never studied film directing, but I had been directing documentaries almost ten years. I had never even been on a fiction film set and the whole world of fiction filmmaking was a total mystery to me. I found documentaries more fascinating. I believed that nothing could be more captivating than to witness real life on screen.

Now, after directing five short narrative films, I am completely addicted to the world of fiction. Before shooting my thesis film, I experimented with long shots (my KB “The Consequences of Spooning”), moving camera (one shot short “She So Loved The Moon”), reactional documentary style (dogme film “The Final Stop”) and intimate point-of-view of a teenage girl (pre-thesis film “So, Here We Are”). One of those films was dialogue heavy, while one of them non-scripted and fully improvised by actors. Two of the scripts I wrote myself and developed the dialogue with actors. The locations varied; from streets to small apartments, including a bus interior and a dive bar. For my KB, we designed two bedrooms and for the pre-thesis, a French-style café. I worked with non-actors and semi-professionals, choosing only female department heads for one of my crews.

I combined all those styles and experiments in my thesis film, a coming-of-age period piece titled “Three August Days”. I had a mostly female crew and cast non-actor children. We combined documentary style with long shots and moving camera on location.

Reflecting on my development, I feel the more I have worked with my projects, the more I have moved towards capturing naturalistic moments and with a real-life feel. I have found my way back to my love of documentaries in another way. I am excited to see

where this path leads me and how I can combine my interest in fiction and documentary in my future projects.

In this Master's Report, I will touch on the problems I am primarily tackling as a film director. All of them point to one big question – the question of manipulation. As a leader of a project, I have to kindle other people's excitement to work with me and convince them to give themselves fully to the project. Sometimes, even I myself have moments of hesitation (which are, unfortunately, frequent). How do I motivate people when I feel my motivation is fading? How do I get raw and naturalistic moments out of actors? To what extent is tricking them acceptable and justified? How do I shamelessly promote my film? How do I avoid feeling obnoxious and getting disillusioned during the process when my mind is only occupied with my movie and nothing else fits into that picture?

A little spoiler alert: none of those questions will get answered in this Master's Report. I guess this will be my curse as a filmmaker: to find the solutions. And maybe, if I had all the answers, the creative process and collaboration might not feel that fascinating anymore.

WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW

I wrote the script (first working title “Coca Cola”) in the Screenwriting for Directors class taught by professor Stuart Kelban in the Fall 2013 semester. It was the third script we were required to write in this class. I had been struggling writing the first two scripts because of my poor English, but mostly because of my insufficient knowledge about American life. I wanted to tell universal stories, but couldn’t really fit anything into Austin or Texas, where I presumably would realize these scripts. My first script had no dialogue and had only one character (which I later developed into my KB project). For my second script, I came up with 3-4 ideas, none of them developing into a coherent script in the end.

For my last attempt, Stuart recommended that I write the first draft in my mother tongue, in Estonian, and then translate it to English. This was a liberating factor and as soon as I opened a new document, the story poured out. I wrote the first draft in one evening. Everything on my mind from being fresh to the U.S. and having been away from home for months, ended up in this draft. This was a period when I was mostly tackling comparisons between where I came from and where I ended up. I was experiencing cultural and linguistic differences, adapting myself to the over consuming culture, comparing my Soviet background to a capitalist one, questioning my economic status/background, and of course, mostly, I was missing my home.

When I started to write in my own language, I knew what I wanted to say. It was easy to picture the locations and characters because I was not stuck with Google translating the words I wanted to say and never really being sure I was getting the meaning precise. I was able to use my own words in Estonian to give a very precise description.

I had been editing a documentary about the Baltic states freedom revolution at the end of the '80s and the beginning of the '90s with an Icelandic director and scriptwriter a year before I started my studies at UT Austin. After watching an enormous amount of archival footage, I started to think about my own perception of the Singing Revolution. During that time, I was applying to UT Austin and wrote in my application letter that this topic would be interesting for me to explore during my years at UT Austin. It was something I was thinking about, but I never thought I would actually write a script in my first semester.

“Three August Days” is a very personal story, adding moments of my own childhood and exploring my own ignorance during those hectic times. The story takes place in Estonia during the three crucial days in August 1991 when Estonia won its independence after half a century of Soviet rule. It starts during the Soviet occupation and ends in an independent country. The main character is Eva, a 10-year-old Estonian girl, who develops a secret crush on Kir, a 12-year-old Russian boy. Both Eva’s friends and family despise Kir simply because of his nationality. Unfortunately, Kir is unaware of Eva’s fondness, and is instead focused on a mystical drink named Coca-Cola—which he’s only ever seen on Finnish television. While Eva’s parents are out fighting and protecting their freedom from the Soviet troops, Eva sees her own opportunity and sets upon a journey to get the desired drink and share it with Kir. Watching with her parents as Russian tanks leave Estonia, Eva's romantic interests find common ground with current political events that surround her.

In my thesis film I am exploring how children perceive and experience a historical moment of political change, when their background and life experience is too limited to fully understand the significance and importance of such events.

DOCUMENTARY-STYLE

I love to watch other filmmakers talk about their inspirations, watch their mood boards, listen to music clips and delve with them into the unknown territories. Some filmmakers I envy see a single attractive image and try to develop their idea based on that. My own approach always feels very simple. The story comes first and then it dictates the visual style. It starts from an insignificant moment from my own life, which meant a lot for me or has been haunting me later. For my thesis film idea, this haunting detail was the muddy cap from the first Coca-Cola I ever bought.

I wanted my thesis film to have an intimate and naturalistic feel, so shooting in “documentary-style” felt like the right decision. Using a handheld camera allowed us to shoot long continuous takes. Many scenes were shot only in one shot and cut in the editing process. It was important to stay close with the main character, focusing only on her world. I wanted to create for the audience an experience where they would see and feel everything through the main character’s eyes and have the same emotional and informational understanding from those hectic days. To increase the experience, we mostly stayed in tight close-ups or used subjective point-of-view framing.

As references, we watched (along with my Director of Photography Lotta Kilian) films from the Dardenne brothers (for continuous documentary-style camera), Lynne Ramsay (for building an intimate world), Terrence Malick’s “The Tree of Life” (for the visual poetry of the childhood) and Ulrich Seidl’s “Paradise: Hope” (for the feel of natural bonding between the teenage girls). All these movies and filmmakers are very different both in style and in theme, but they helped me to visualize my thoughts to the DoP.

I was amazed at how hard it was to find a period piece totally shot in documentary style. I understood the difficulties with that kind of approach as soon as we started with our camera tests. During the camera tests, we realized that movements with the camera are very restricted. We planned to shoot documentary-style improvising with the camera, but because it was a period piece, we could not set design or control everything around us 360-degrees. We could just move with the camera only a bit, especially in exteriors, because the modern world (cars, buildings, etc) would appear in the shot.

I combined camera tests with rehearsals so the actors (mainly Caroline and other children) would be able to gain a feel for what the shooting looks like, and Lotta could play around with the camera and we could see in what direction we would like to go.

We did three camera tests on location – Eva with her parents listening to the radio in the kitchen (scene 04), Eva and the girls playing in the courtyard (scene 06) and Kir biking around Eva on the district street (scene 03).



Figure 01: Scene 04 rehearsal, Father and Mother



Figure 02: Scene 04 rehearsal, Granny and Eva

The scene with the girls turned out great both in acting and shooting wise during the rehearsals. It was scheduled to be on our first shooting day, so I went to the shoot with confidence. Of course, nothing turned out like we had planned and rehearsed. The

weather was terribly cold during the shooting day and the crew five times bigger, so it took a long time to open up the girls and make them comfortable. Also, improvising with the camera felt too complicated for the DoP because the girls were non-actors (meaning: unpredictable and camera-shy) and the scene dialogue heavy (the DoP did not speak Estonian). We tried several times, but then decided to shoot traditional close-ups and a wide shot to tie it all together.

The closest to our original approach we probably got was in the scenes in Eva's home (for example the scene 18 when the Estonian re-independence is announced in TV) and in the district shop (scene 15, where Eva is waiting in the line to buy a Coke). I feel those scenes are 100% from Eva's point of view both visually and emotionally.



Figure 03: Point-of-view shot (scene 18)

Figure 04: Eva's close-up (scene 18)

The busy shooting schedule unfortunately did not give us time to play around with poetic point of view shots described in the script and we had to cut them down.

(RE)DISCOVERING THE WORLD

Serious re-writing of my script started in Spring 2016. I had returned home to start the pre-production of my thesis film. I switched the writing language to Estonian. I did my re-writes mostly while I was translating the script to English for my thesis committee and fellow students back at UT Austin. Translating made every question mark more visible and made the holes in the story stand out immediately.

When I first wrote the script back in the U.S., I felt that I was exaggerating the conflict between Estonians and Russians. I questioned it. Should I tone it down? Maybe it was not that bad, or at least not that vocal? When I moved back to Estonia, I was participating in my apartment block's meeting. German prisoners of war built the building, where I am living, during the Second World War. It used to be a house for high-ranking Soviet officers. Now, it's mostly occupied by the widows of those officers and young Estonian hipsters. The generational, cultural and language gap is unavoidable. The meeting ended quickly, because both groups were yelling at each other in their own language: "Speak Estonian, we live in Estonia!" or "Speak Russian, we don't understand what are you deciding here!" I understood. Nothing had changed. People were still not speaking the same language, both literally and metaphorically. The failed meeting made me confident that this movie was needed. I am hoping to open some public discussions after my Estonian premiere this August and will definitely keep exploring the topic in my future work.

I was working from Mustamäe – the Soviet-bloc district where I grew up and which inspired me to write the story. I did location scouting in tandem to writing the script and found it extremely helpful. Being on the (shooting) location and among Estonians and Russians advanced the story a lot and gave the needed details to make the story juicier.

While walking around my childhood neighborhoods, I was reminded of details I had forgotten. For example, I changed girls playing in the playground to girls hanging on the carpet beating racks as we did as children. This little detail added a truer Soviet-era feel to the movie. I was also interested in capturing the now-abandoned racks for the future. As we could not find the perfect courtyard for our movie, we ended up bringing the carpet beating racks from somewhere else and placing them exactly in the right spot.



Figure 05: Archive photo



Figure 06: Transporting the carpet beating racks



Figure 07: Girls playing (still from the movie)

I used the visual of hanging upside down on the carpet beating as the thing Eva is into. For Kir I added him eating sunflower seeds. At the end of the movie, these two worlds come together.

I had actually started location scouting a year and a half before the shooting while visiting home during Christmas break. This mostly consisted of making sure that there were still unrenovated buildings and courtyards left. I started driving through East Estonia, near the Russian border, and explored towns that are known as relicts from the Soviet area. I quickly understood that the architecture is a bit different there and does not give the grey anonymous look I was going for.

I continued walking through the whole of Mustamäe during the summer of 2015 and mapping out every suitable playground with Soviet elements. There were abandoned playgrounds which looked perfect, but had poor background (for example, green lush parks) or wide grey buildings surrounding modern playgrounds. For me it was important to find a location where we could shoot at least in two directions without worrying about modern heat insulation covering the building or freshly painted colorful balconies taking the attention away. The world where those kids live had to look tired.

Because my location scouting was during such a long period (a year and half), some of my favorite locations got renovated during that time. The most extreme example is my second favorite location, which I had double checked a week before the camera test and when we arrived with a main crew, instead of the playground, we found a freshly covered parking lot still having parking lines drawn with chalk. We were shooting at the end of July, and there was a big chance that our picked locations could go under renovations at the beginning of the summer.



Figure 08: Location scouting in East Estonia



Figure 09: Cars front of the houses

The other problem, which I was very aware of during the location scouting, was the tremendous number of cars parked in every possible corner. To make it easier for everybody, the locations had to be behind the buildings, where traditionally you find underground parking houses covered with grass.

I am not going into details concerning how we were able to shoot mostly outside pretending it is 1991. My great location manager Kādi Rammula was taking care of that. During five of the nine shooting days, we were shooting exteriors, where cars were organized to park somewhere else and modern elements removed. The hardest day was probably the day we shot scene three, where Eva is walking home from the shop and the Russian boys are teasing her. We shot the scene in front of an apartment building in Õismäe (another Soviet bloc building district). In order to shoot the scene in which Eva is walking to the downtown shop, five roads had to be closed. While shooting the scene in front of the downtown shop, the bus traffic had to be held.

This all sounded too crazy and preposterous for me. I was not sure if a movie should make ordinary people's life difficult? Who am I to ask 200 people to find a parking spot somewhere else in an already packed district? Thankfully my wise crew said that when

we are going to do it, then we will do it as well as possible. This was one of the biggest learning moments for me – I should shoot the movie in a way where the low budget wasn't apparent and distracting the audience from letting themselves dive into the world we are building. As much as my conscience would allow me, I tried to let my imagination fly as I composed shot lists.

We still were very modest as I understand now, and tried to block no more than one road at a time. During the shoot days in the district areas Mustamäe and Õismäe we could only “clear” two directions per shooting day. I am happy to say that we had no problems. There were only one to two cars in the beginning of each shooting day which had not been parked elsewhere and our location manager found solutions quicker than we could set up the camera.

CASTING IS EVERYTHING

I am a terrible dialogue writer. As I have written all my scripts at UT Austin in English (except my thesis), I always thought it was because English is not my native language. But it turned out that, unfortunately, I am also a terrible dialogue writer in Estonian.

It was somehow very easy to write children's dialogue for me. I felt I was true to the way children spoke during that time period and the topics on which they were touching. I remembered a lot of slang words from the Soviet time period and the dialogue felt like children would say those things. (This feedback is based on other people's comments).

I did not do as well with the adults' dialogue. I tried to picture every character as a certain person from my own life and was imagining how this person would talk. But I guess because Eva's parents served mostly as exposition in the story or as something to be able to compare Eva's world to, I couldn't really find their voice. The whole dialogue still felt empty and constructed. Their purpose was mainly to give the historical context to the international audience. I wish I could have found a cleverer way to do it.

My only hope was to let the actors develop the dialogue (like I had done with all the other four short fiction films I shot in Austin). I thought it would be more natural and because I had cast them because of their type, "they should know better".

This tactic was especially helpful in the scenes between the main characters. I described to Caroline Kruberg (Eva) and Dima Bepalov (Kir) the situation and let them improvise on their own. I wrote the moments I liked into the script. This approach was of course tricky, because next time they had to act out what came naturally to them previously.

Somehow, I always ended up casting actors everyone else thinks are a bad choice. This happened with Caroline – my main crew and thesis committee thought I had made a mistake. I think it's mainly because I write what I know (meaning I only write about myself and I am a totally emotionless and uncharismatic person), so I tend to cast people I feel close to. There was something in Caroline that I knew made her perfect for the role. She looked younger than she was; she could be ordinary and beautiful, vulnerable and strong at the same time. She was a professional athlete and was therefore focused and ambitious. I knew she would be easy to work with, because she wanted to work. She was independent (I still have not met any of her family members, because she always came to the rehearsals or set alone). But most of all – she was thoughtful.



Figure 10: Caroline during the casting



Figure 11: Caroline during the casting



Figure 12: Caroline during the casting

For Kir, I knew I wanted to cast someone from the countryside, where the boys still go “for walks”. We had several casting sessions in East Estonia, near the Russian border. I think I went to every Russian school in this region, because during the first rehearsal when I walked around Sillamäe (one of the towns) every teenage boy whom I met on the street

greeted me, because I had probably photographed him, asked some personal questions and written down his full name, date of birth and parent's phone number.

Dima was brave and could be a rebel and nerd at the same time. He had freckles, which during the summer disappeared (!) and he lied about being a great biker. A perfect match! I was between some boys for the role of Kir. But Dima won my heart when, during the rehearsals and call backs, he took the leading role and improvised perfect scenes, making the other boys comfortable and engaged. I showed my three favorite candidates to Caroline and asked who she thought I should pick. She chose Dima and who am I to make her fall in love in the movie with someone she didn't like in real life?



Figure 13: Dima during the call-backs



Figure 14: Dima during the casting

To have a great chemistry between the boys, I chose Kir's friends from the same town. It was easier to drive there to meet them all and rehearse together. Mostly I let them play games and get to know each other. Occasionally I tried to figure out how to discipline them and establish myself as an angry old woman who should be respected. It almost worked out. (The shooting day with the bike and the football scenes was stressful, because three preteen boys would disappear the moment you would look somewhere else.) I think this directing habit comes from my love of directing observational

documentaries, where although you spend so much time together with your subjects, you can't get very close with them, so they would not try to communicate with you during the shooting.

For Eva's friends I was looking for a certain type for each character, so if I noticed someone suitable during the casting sessions for the main role, I did let my casting director know.



Figure 15: Eva's friends improvising and bonding during rehearsals

HOW TO CREATE NOTHING

My shooting script ended up having six exterior locations (courtyard, district shop, downtown shop, district street, downtown street, view from Eva's apartment), three interior locations (district shop, downtown shop and Eva's apartment with five different spaces) and a trolley bus.

Most of our crew was born after 1991 and never witnessed the Soviet era themselves. Of course, shooting a period piece does not require someone to have lived during that area, but in this case, being somewhat true to the reality was important. The events featured in the movie happened just 25 years ago and half of the nation still remembers that time very freshly. We were reminded of it all the time when we had extras on the set, who compared our set to the real shops from the Soviet era.

The shops were empty back in the days featured in my short. There was nothing to buy, although the shops were always full of hopeful customers and the queues long. The shelves did not look visually empty, however, as they were always carefully filled with useless products. All the desired goods sometimes even did not end up on the shelves, but got grabbed by the customers at the moment they appeared.

I think we unfortunately did not fully resolve the question of how to actually set design the situation where the shop is full of people, but the shelves are filled with useless products. We did not go over the exact list of "useless products" and it became lost in translation. It is hard to explain why something was widely available, but had no appeal to the audience (for example juice or vegetables, what people would anyway grow or produce themselves at their summer cottages) or why something which seems

unimportant now (for example chocolate boxes) would be “deficit” (the product not widely available) those days.



Figure 16: Archive photo from the queue



Figure 17: Still from the movie

Our production designer Tiiu-Ann Pello and the set dresser Ketlin Kasar did an amazing job with Eva’s apartment. The journalists from the Estonian daily newspaper “Eesti Päevaleht” were wondering why this apartment had two kitchens and did not understand that one of them was fake (we built it adjacent to one of the bedrooms, because the original kitchens from these apartments are so tiny that they fit only two to three people).



Figure 18: Article in “Eesti Päevaleht”



Figure 19: Kitchen set

RECCE MADE IT ALL HAPPEN

One month before the shoot I invited my Director of Photography Lotta Kilian to Estonia for a week to visit the locations, do camera tests, rehearse with the main actors, meet her crew and talk about shots and the overall visual concept of the movie.

MY 1st AD Kadri Kask was scheduling the busy week and asked me, when I wanted to have the recce. I proposed Saturday as the last day. At that point, I had no idea what a recce was. We had not thoroughly talked about it at UT (in U.S. known as Tech Scout) and, being totally ignorant in regards to fiction filmmaking before coming to the U.S., I had never heard that term before. I remember forcing my DoP and production designer to come to the main location and go over every angle a day before my pre-thesis film shoot. I did it because I was freaking out and it let me get some sleep before the shoot.

I googled recce and instantly fall in love with that step of pre-production. It is basically a technical location scouting, but involves every department, so everything what could come up during the shooting is already solved in pre-production. Of course, there are always problems which arise the moment before the camera will run (and sometimes also after).

We would visit every location during one long day (except the trolley bus). All the department heads attended: me, the producer, assistant director, location manager, director of photography, gaffer, production designer and prop person. Only the sound mixer was missing due to a scheduling conflict.

After arriving at each location, my AD would tell us when and what scene we would shoot in that location. Then I would go over every shot/direction in that location (what will happen in the shot and what we will see). After that every department would take their own notes, ask questions or voice their worries. We would change some scheduling orders because of the light, etc.

I am pretty sure that only because of the recce were we able to shoot this movie in nine days.



Figure 20: On set, shooting



Figure 21: On set, revising

WORKING WITH NON-ACTOR CHILDREN

I basically wrote my pre-thesis, narrative short film “So, Here We Are” to prepare for my thesis shoot. The main character in my previous film was a preteen girl, who met her 5-year old stepsister. For me it was important to work with non-actor children during my pre-thesis to figure out my own way of directing them and to be more confident and experienced when I started to shoot my thesis film.

Because, as I mentioned before, I always write about myself and cast based on type, both girls I ended up working with for my films – Carrie (the lead of my pre-thesis film) and Caroline, had several similar characterizations. Many of the tips and tricks I developed while working with Carrie also applied to Caroline.

I trust actors a lot and make them my biggest collaborators. During the casting, callbacks or even first two weeks of rehearsals, I never showed the script to Caroline. I told her the main plot of the movie, explained the main tasks in the scene and let her improvise a lot.

After that we met for a week to read the script together scene by scene. We would discuss every scene based on the actions and thought process of the main character. During that week, I would bring the script to our rehearsals and would not let her take it home. The main reason I did this was to get to know her first reactions and thoughts before she would discuss it at home and get ideas from someone else. We talked about emotions in every scene and were trying to find the equivalents from her own life. During the rehearsals, I would refer to the situations she had told me before, when needed. But I tried not to overload her before the shooting.

Every evening I would walk her home and casually drop some ideas about acting or filmmaking. I was hoping she would think about them overnight. In the beginning of rehearsals, I would show her couple of clips and explain what I like about the acting and hoped that she would store it in the back of her mind and develop some tricks for herself. We also drew the whole tension graph for the film together and went through the emotions. I think I put lot on her, but I knew the days would be long, so I couldn't treat her like a sweet little girl, but rather a full partner, a professional.

We rehearsed almost every scene, except the really easy ones, walking on the streets and waking up in the morning (which on the page was only one and a half lines). Those two things seemed so easy, but, of course were one of the hardest ones for a non-actor, as I understood during the shooting. Where should she look when she is walking? (Not straight, because there is a camera). But why would she look to the side, if there is nothing to see? Maybe she should look down (it could have fit with her feeling), but it did not look good in camera. What should she think about, how should she feel while walking back from a grocery store? Sometimes, running errands I myself am thinking so deeply about something else that later I don't even remember doing some things although there is evidence that I did. But how does this look physically? How do people wake up? We do it every morning, but never capture the exact moment.

All these questions came to me too late – on the set when we were ready to go for a take or after the first take. Shooting the morning scene was the only time I took 20 minutes off and asked everyone to leave the set so that I could rehearse with Caroline. We tried different things and ended up choreographing the whole moment. Again, there was a lesson to learn: to act out every scene beforehand and figure out what it would take for it to be performed by an actor, specifically a non-actor. Short scenes definitely don't mean easier scenes.

I am certainly a mean director when needed. During the long shooting hours, the teenager's focus keeps fading and it was hard to keep her/him in the needed mood for the whole day, especially if it was an uncomfortable feeling. My movie does not have any strong emotions, but there are moments of anxiety, confusion and embarrassment.

The breaking point for Caroline was during the last shooting day when she felt comfortable and perky, understanding well her position in the whole movie. We were shooting the scene inside the downtown shop, when her character is nervous about not getting the Coke and then is disappointed actually not getting the Coke. We had rehearsed the scene several times and it had really great results, but during the shoot she was not able to focus 100%, I did not believe her. We tried different things and I ran out of ideas. The whole tension in the scene could have built up mostly on her performance. There was no other way than to trick her to actually feel the anxiety and tune down the perky mood of hers.

The same applied to Dima while shooting the end of the Coke-sharing scene between the two main characters. It was the end of a long day, the sun was setting, the crew was tired, mood on the set was anxious and Dima and Caroline had developed a bond which also included some sort of rebellion towards the production. His reaction after unsuccessfully opening a Coke bottle was reckless.

The only way at the end of the long days was to take their confidence away. This all sounds harsh, but it made both scenes work. Of course after finishing the scenes I talked with the actors and explained to them that bullying them just helped to get better performance out of them.

WORKING IN DIFFERENT CONTINENTS

The hardest task for me during the post-production period, besides the creative decisions, was managing the workflow in four different cities and two different continents.

I started editing the movie alone in my home in Estonia and polished the fine cut with my co-editor Artemis Anastasiadou in Austin, Texas.

My composer Jesús Gerdel had moved to New York and worked on the movie from there. I visited him twice in NYC. We talked about music, found places where we should hear music and he tried out some things while I was sitting next to him. It was definitely the most fruitful collaboration process during the whole post-production process.

The Foley recording, sound design and mixing took place in Estonia, with me not being present for any of those stages. We had talked through every moment in the movie with the sound designer Tanel Kadalipp, so there were no big surprises. We did an ADR session with the main cast (Eva, parents and granny) in Tallinn before I left for Austin.

The color grading took place in Berlin, Germany, with colorist Florian Lampersperger and was fully supervised by my Director of Photography, Lotta Kilian. She did not get the lenses for the shoot she wanted, so it was important for her to be present during the final grading.

Managing all those different time zones was tricky in the last weeks, when Skype sessions and decision-making meetings with those in Europe took place in the middle of the night. Not being physically present during the finishing touches was also hard emotionally and

required a lot of trust from me. In a way it was better, because I watched and listened to everything with fresh eyes and ears, but it took time to get used to big changes, especially because I had been editing the movie myself for months. I took time to watch and listen to the work from others. I gave my feedback after I had gone through the changes a couple times so it wouldn't be based on my first reaction. It was an interesting experiment, but in the future, I would prefer to be present at every final stage where the decisions are made.

REGRETS

I will always regret that:

- I did not take time off during the nervous moments on the shoot to have a moment to distance myself and make decisions with a clear mind. I felt like I needed to know the answer right away and decided everything in a hurry. Especially hard was the second shooting day when we shot both the district shop interior and exterior. When we arrived at the second location, the set was not ready and we lost time. In the end, we had only a couple of hours' time to shoot the second scene, where Eva witnesses Kir get caught trying to steal a bottle from another customer's basket. Obviously, since we were dealing with many extras and child actors, this time was not enough to get everything we needed, and it is unfortunately visible in the final cut.

- We did shot lists and storyboards after scheduling our shoot, which made us rush a lot during some shooting days and have a more relaxed schedule during others (for example during the scenes which we shot in one shot).

- Somehow during the first time in my (fiction) film career, I did not take the opening image seriously and due to that we decided to shoot it during the pick-ups (which never happened). Because of that the movie does not have an eye-catching beginning, nor does it set the right mood and theme from the beginning.

- I did not shoot a couple of detail shots because we were running out of time. As a result, I have one scene which does not make sense and another for which I needed to hire an expensive visual effects designer.

- I did not insist on time to rehearse with extras in the beginning. It was my first time working with more than three actors. I thought that it would be a great idea to get the extras who had lines from small amateur theatres. I met with the actors on set a moment before we were ready to shoot and had no time to rehearse. We did the first take and all the five extras with lines overacted. I had five minutes to give them directions while approximately 60 people were patiently waiting for the next take. In subsequent scenes, I always took the extras aside and let them say the lines so that I would know what I would be dealing with in the following minutes and would be better able to prepare myself.

The regrets I do not regret anymore:

- Several tracking shots throughout the movie. We had a steady-cam operator on set for a couple of days. It took a lot of time to set up the movement and then rehearse with the children and sometimes with extras so that those shots would work. When we already had eight takes of the shot when Eva is walking with the Coke bottle and Kir is following her, and none of them were perfect, I started to regret the whole idea of doing it. Now, after several feedback sessions, it is always the most memorable moment for the audience.
- Not practicing the opening of the Coke bottle. Somehow it worked out in editing, but we wasted a lot of shooting time to try it out on the spot.

The regret I never regretted:

- Cutting down scenes in the middle of the shoot. I decided to cut out one and a half scenes while shooting because of we were running out of time. I had wisely made these decisions and ranked the scenes before we went to production, so I would know ahead of time which scenes I could lose when needed while not having any holes in the story.

WHO WANTS TO SEE THIS MOVIE?

I have not figured it out yet.

HOPEFUL FUTURE

Nearly a hundred people have been involved in the making of this film. Out of respect for their time and work, I truly hope “Three August Days” will find its widest possible audience.

I will promise here that my next step in my professional life will be to write a feature length script, which I will make into a movie soon. I also plan to develop and shoot a couple of documentaries. Last time when I promised to write a script reflecting my background and shoot it during my studies at UT Austin, it ended up coming true. So, I hope this curse will continue and I will find myself on the film set again soon. This time hopefully without the reflux.

Appendix 01: Shooting script example in Estonian

SCENE 06: Eva is playing with her friends in the courtyard, Kir appears

<p>EXT. HOOV - HOMMIK</p> <p>Kerge tuulelil keerutab pesu nõõridel. Roosad sukupüksid pöörlevad tuule käes vastu helesiniseid sukupükse. Eva ripub pea alaspidi kloppimispuul ja silmitseb sukupükse.</p> <p>Kloppimise puu juures keset Mustamäe paneelilamuid mängib ja näidistab punt varastelemelisi tüdrukuid. Kloppimispuul on mõnest kohast värv maha koorunud ja kerge rooste peal, puu jalad on kergelt kõverad.</p> <p>Igaat kaarent paistab kiivlinn. Ühte nurka jääb hall garaaž, mille esine asfalt on auklik. Teisel pool on pesukuivatamise puud, mis peamiselt täis äsjapestud voodipesu, seelika riideid ja rida taskurätikuid.</p> <p>SILJA (8) turnib Eva kõrval kloppimispuul, hoiab üht oma tennist nagu mikrofon, teeb mõningaid tantsumiigutusi ja laulab kummalises keeles, mis kõlab nagu inglise keel, kuid samas mitte. Kunaagi lumivalge olnud tennisel on isevärvitud neonroheline pael peal.</p> <p>SILJA (lauldes) Foorde veerifööst taiim...</p> <p>Teised tüdrukud mängivad kummikeksu. Kumm on kokku sõlmitud mitmeest erinevast tükist. ANU (10), võti nõõriga keelask, ja MARIS (11) hoiavad kummi. KATRIN (12) hüppab paljajalu. Marise kõrval on paar dressipluusi hunnikus, ühe kääkotike ja kellegi kotad laialil.</p> <p>Katrin hüppab Silja kõrvale ja nad lõpetavad laulu koos Eva poole poseerides.</p> <p>KATRIN JA SILJA Kokakoola isiiiii-iiiiiit!</p> <p>Mõlemad limmiteerivad pudelist joomist - Silja kasutab selleks oma tennist, Katrin nähtamatut pudelit.</p> <p>Tüdrukud itsitavad, Eva ka.</p> <p>Silja, endiselt kloppimispuul istudes, paneb tennise tagasi jalga ja seob paalu kinni.</p> <p>SILJA Eile soome telkust tuli, just enne Immeest!</p> <p>ANU Oh, me olime siis alles suvilas.</p> <p>Silja on tennise jalga saanud ja hüppab kloppimisepuult maha. Tema kord on hüpata.</p> <p>Katrin kiigutab end kätega kloppimisepuul edasi-tagasi.</p> <p>(CONTINUED)</p>	<p>CONTINUED: 2.</p> <p>KATRIN Ja neil olid värvilised tennarid!</p> <p>SILJA Vihma sadasi. Ja värv ei tulndki maha. Kujutate ette!</p> <p>ANU Päriselt ka?</p> <p>EVA Ma unustasin eile ära, et Immees tuleb.</p> <p>SILJA Mis mõttes unustasid ära?</p> <p>Silja teeb hüpates vee.</p> <p>EVA Noh, sellepärast, et...</p> <p>MARIS Viga!</p> <p>SILJA Ias ma teen uuesti, mul kogemata läks.</p> <p>MARIS Ei saa, minu kordi!</p> <p>Silja vahetab Marisega kohad. Marise kord on hüpata.</p> <p>EVA Teate, mis minuga eile juhtus?</p> <p>MARIS Aga teate, kes ükskord kokakoolat sai?</p> <p>KATRIN Noh, kesse?</p> <p>Kõikide pilgud pöörduvad Marise poole, kes ilmselgelt naudid tähelepanu.</p> <p>MARIS Mu insi ülemus!</p> <p>EVA Ja kuidas see maitses?</p> <p>Maris ootab kuni hüppamise lõpetab.</p> <p>(CONTINUED)</p>
<p>CONTINUED: 3.</p> <p>MARIS Ta ütles, et see maitses nagu limonaad.</p> <p>SILJA Mis mõttes nagu limonaad?</p> <p>Tüdrukud on ilmselgelt pettunud. Anu ja Silja tõstavad kummi kõrgemale.</p> <p>KATRIN Ma küll ei usu, et ta seda päriselt sai.</p> <p>Maris on hetkelises segaduses.</p> <p>MARIS Ei noh, aga palju palju paremini.</p> <p>Eva vaatab ikka huvitatult Marisele otsa, kuni ta pilk tabab Kiri, kes astub oma trepikojast välja.</p> <p>Kiril on kaks vaipa ksenias ja vaibaklopiits käes. Madal õhke joonistab poisist asfaldile pika veidra varju.</p> <p>Ka Anu märkab poissi.</p> <p>ANU (näpuga näidates) Appi, see vastik venku tuleb!</p> <p>Teised pöörduvad näpuga näidatud suunda ja katkestavad mängu. Katrin hakkab kaksikumi kokku korjama, kuid Anu seisab ikka veel kummi sees. Katrin sikutab kummi.</p> <p>KATRIN Anu, tule välja!</p> <p>Anu tuleb kummi seest välja. Silja korjab tüdrukute dressipluusesid ja oma kortasid kokku.</p> <p>Maris on juba puude all peidus, kääkott üle öla.</p> <p>MARIS Tehke ruttu, enne kui ta jälle kummi ketki löikab!</p> <p>Katrinil on kumm kokku pakitud. Tüdrukud jooksevad rõdude suunas.</p> <p>Eva ei märka seda alguses, sest vahib ainiti Kiri poole.</p> <p>Kir kõnnib kloppimise puude poole.</p> <p>Teised tüdrukud näevad Evat edasi kõõluma.</p> <p>(CONTINUED)</p>	<p>CONTINUED: 4.</p> <p>KATRIN (hüüab poolhäälel) Eva! Tule siia!</p> <p>Eva vaatab tüdrukute poole ja siis tagasi läheneva Kiri suunas.</p> <p>Kiri vari ulatub juba peasegu temani.</p> <p>Eva ei liiguta end.</p> <p>ANU Tegelt ka, Eva, ta on juha nii lähedal!</p> <p>Eva hüppab vaibakloppimise puult alla ja kõnnib kahjutundega rõdude suunas ise tagasi vaadates.</p> <p>Kir heidab vaiba puule ja hakkab seda kloppima.</p>

Appendix 02: Moodboard examples

SHOOTING DAY 01: SCENE 06



SHOOTING DAY 02: SCENES 01 AND 02



Appendix 03: Exterior locations



EXT. DISTRICT SHOP

Scene: 01

Location: Mustamäe



EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE

Scene: 03

Location: Õismäe



EXT. BEHIND THE HOUSE

Scenes: 04, 05, 18.

Location: Mustamäe



EXT. COURTYARD

Scenes: 6, 21, 22.

Location: Mustamäe



EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET

Scene: 13

Location: Downtown Tallinn



EXT. DOWNTOWN SHOP

Scene: 14

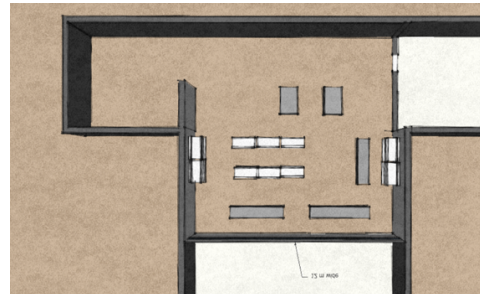
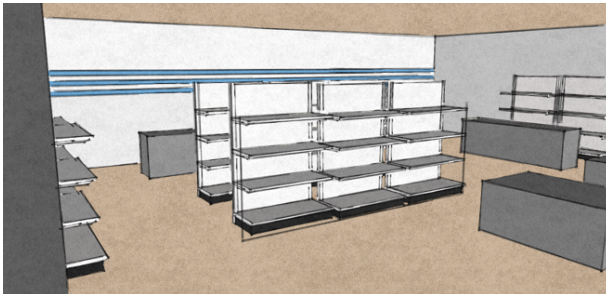
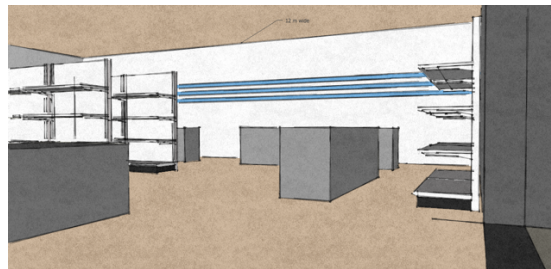
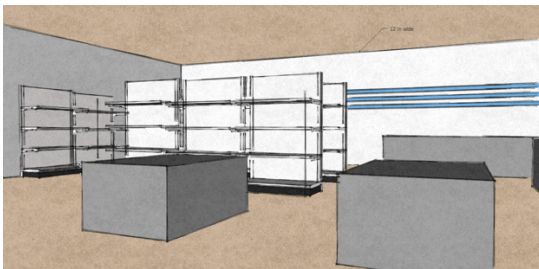
Location: Kalamaja

Appendix 04: Floorplans for set construction

EVA'S APARTMENT INT – SCENES 04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 18, 19, 20, 23



DISTRICT SHOP INT – SCENE 02

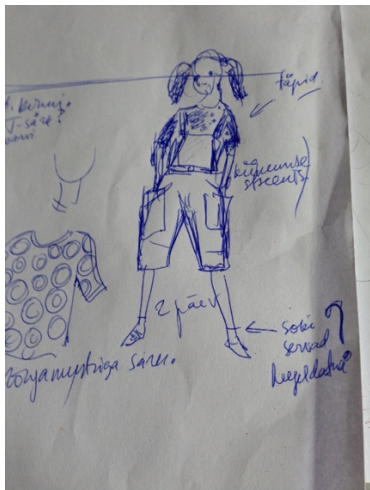


Appendix 05: Costume design sketches

EVA'S COSTUME FOR THE FIRST SCRIPT DAY– SCENES 01-05



EVA' S COSTUME FOR THE SECOND SCRIPT DAY– SCENES 06-16



Appendix 06: Dress rehearsal and costume ideas

CHARACTER: MOTHER

